

History of the United Unitarian & Universalist Society of Mukwonago

Mrs. Martha Frazier, 1898

Foreword by Nissley Kaste: Church Historian, October, 11, 2003

The United Unitarian and Universalist Society of Mukwonago was founded in 1877. Twenty-one years later, in 1898, the following history of the church was written by Mrs. Martha Frazier. She and her husband William were leaders in the church.

It was the Fraziers who provided weekend lodging and meals to ministers who traveled by train to Mukwonago, or to North Prairie in the years before a train passed through Mukwonago.

Martha wrote the words to hymns that were sung on special occasions. She wrote poetry and articles, some of which were published, according to her grandson, Frazier Lobdell. For future generations, however, her most lasting contribution to the church was the writing of this history.

Born on December 12, 1826, near Springfield, Mass., she was a sister of Sarah (Mrs. Martin) Field, but the two girls were separated at an early age when they lost both parents and were adopted into separate families. As a school teacher from Illinois, Martha, while visiting Sarah, met William Frazier, her future husband, and during their courtship she lived in town with the Fields and taught school. She earned one dollar a week plus room and board.

She was married to William Frazier in 1848 and they raised two daughters. William was born in Homer, New York. He came west with his parents in 1848 and settled on a 400 acre farm that is still standing. (It is the farm on the north side just before reaching the Fox River going east on Highway ES, from Mukwonago) William became a respected farmer who bred fine-wool sheep. He was town chairman and county supervisor. Martha herself was a member of the local school board for seven terms.

Because of her long association with the church and her strong commitment to its ideals, Martha Frazier was a credible witness to the formation and early history of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Mukwonago. The history that follows is a copy, word for word, of the history written by Mrs. Frazier in 1898, typewritten on legal sized paper many years ago. Mrs. Frazier was 72 when she wrote the history. She could remember ministers who traveled to Mukwonago on weekends, starting with the arrival of an early itinerant minister in 1848.

“The church history was probably prepared at the time Rev. Ralph was pastor, as it was found among his papers and sent to the church by his daughter in 1932.” Ave Farris

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Mrs. Martha Frazier in 1898

I have been asked to write a short history of our church and find that the records have been kept in such a way that but little needed information can be gained from them and memory does not always store away those facts which seem to be essential in making a record.

One is often puzzled to know where to commence searching for the foundations of a church, whether we mean a church edifice or an association for worship and mutual helpfulness.

I sometimes think the foundations of our church were laid far back in the very early days when a few devoted ministers went round from place to place carrying with them the word of life at a time when traveling had but few of its present charming conveniences, often not knowing who was to receive them, glad if they could have a common school house to preach in and a few shillings in collection for pay.

The first minister of our faith to visit Mukwonago was, I think, the Rev. William E. Manley. I do not think that he preached for us, but was agent for the "Better Covenant." This was in 1848.

Father LaFevre also used to come to Mukwonago occasionally in the early days, visiting in the family of Sewall Andrews, and sometimes preached for us, but I do not remember the date.

Later, several ministers came to us, some for a single time, some at stated periods for a few times. One whose home was at Oconomowoc and who supported himself by his trade (cooper) as did Paul, and one who was not settled whose name was Reed, came a good many times. I have no memory in regard to pay and so will conclude that the amount was not burdensome to either party.

Father Mason of Chicago was one of those who got led out into the wilderness. What he came to see he never told, but I will remember his reading of the scriptures. At that time we had never heard anything of the kind so fine.

The sentiment of Universalism seemed to be steadily growing; more and more people were willing to listen and at last there came a tidal wave and it was precipitated in this way:

Brother A.C. Barry had then settled in Rochester and was willing to come up after morning services, by wagon, ten miles, and preach for us at 4:00 p.m. about once a month. There was now a church in town. It was owned by the Congregationalists but all had help to build it. Our people had an express understanding with them that we might use the church whenever it was not occupied. The church had never been used at that hour. We applied for permission to have Brother Barry preach there and were granted the privilege for

twice, but the next time were told that there could be no more Universalist preaching in that house. Thus had they quickly hastened to go back on their pledged word. We had given one hundred dollars for the privilege of hearing two Universalist sermons preached in an orthodox church, not counting one funeral service for Dr. Collins' son. Others of our church had been equally liberal. This decision struck the town after the manner of surprise cannonade: All interested said or did something. The rest laughed and said, "I told you so." For myself, I wrote down a prayer and a chapter of Chronicles, thus working off some of my indignation in a quiet way, for I was never called upon to read them in church.

Then came a strong influence toward building a church edifice of our own. Many good friends helped it onward, especially Sister Hanson who presided at a meeting called at the home of Brother Sewall Andrews for that purpose. The sentiment of that meeting seemed to be that if we could build and have a place of our own, where we would be at home to hold special meetings, funerals, etc., it would be desirable, even if we did not have regular services. Thought soon resulted in action. The Unitarians offered to unite with us in building a church, which offer was accepted, and steps were taken to form a corporate association. A committee on constitution was appointed of which Martin Field (Unitarian) was chairman. Among others with whom Mr. Field consulted was brother B.F. Rogers. The other members of said committee were William Frazier, Otis A. Sargeant and F. M. Payne, and at a meeting held the fourth day of January, 1878, [a] constitution was adopted.

Our organization is such as is generally called a church parish. At this meeting, a committee appointed to report a suitable location for the proposed church were William M. Frazier, Sewall Andrews and Otis F. Sargeant. Also a committee on subscription for building purposes was appointed, namely, Ester P. Blood and Ella Johnston. At annual meeting fourth Saturday in January, 1878, officers elected were Trustees J. N. Crawford, Sewall Andrews and William M. Frazier of whom William M. Frazier was elected President, J. N. Crawford, Vice President; Martin Field, Secretary; and Peter Greely, Treasurer. Our membership soon reached thirty-five or forty. In February, the committee on finances reported subscriptions in money of \$1,431.00 and in labor and teaming, of some hundreds more.

The trustees were authorized to decide the location and also the general plan and size of building. After due consideration, it was determined to build church room above and hall below for our own use and also to rent for purposes of revenue. Our ladies then went to work with enthusiasm and determined to furnish the church and also to build an additional room for a kitchen, dining and waiting room and to furnish the same with necessary conveniences. But the seats for the church room, the Bible for the pulpit and the bell church were paid for by subscriptions. The hall and addition were completed sometime before the church room and were used by others sometimes, especially by the Methodists, but we had to determine not to have preaching until all was ready. We were called upon, however, to bury one of our good brothers from that room, Mr. Peter F. Boss. This was a sad christening of the new building.

When we were nearly ready, we wrote to Rev. Sumner Ellis of Chicago asking what minister we could get to come and spend the summer vacation with us; someone who

would be willing to come for moderate wages and help through dedication. He recommended to us Sister Florence Kollock, who consented to come to us for five dollars per week, and board. The arrangement proved every way satisfactory. We were a happy and a proud people, and the memory of those few weeks will linger with us while life lasts. The time for dedication of the church, was fixed for August 26, 27 and 28th, 1879, and after due consultation, it was determined as far as practicable to invite only ministers from our own state to take part in these services.

The services held during these three days were greatly appreciated and Dr. Barry, chosen to preach the dedication sermon, which was thought the proper thing since he was the one refused admission to the Congregational church.

During the fall of 1879 and summer and fall of 1880, Rev. S. W. Sutton preached for us as supply once or twice a month. Next to him in 1881, Rev. I. A. Eberhardt of Chicago came once a month. In 1882 we made an attempt to have more regular services and joined with Rochester in hiring Rev. F. E. Parsons, he residing in that place. But unfortunate circumstances broke up the arrangement before the close of the year. From that time until the year 1889, we again filled the pulpit with supplies: Rev. Ella Bartlett, Rev. Olympia Brown Willis, Rev. Mary J. DeLong, Rev. John Hilton, came a good deal, and among other names of those I remember as coming to us sometimes were: Rev. Ellis Garfield, M. G. Todd, A. N. Somers, J. L. Dinsmore, R. G. Spafford, J. T. Schlinder, ...Lombard, J.A. Hoyt, A. C. Grier, L. W. Crichtett, L. M. Hawes and Brother B. F. Rogers of blessed memory. Also for Unitarians Rev. Mary Graves, Rev. J. H. Crooker, Rev. Miss Gertrude McGill, Rev. Mrs. Loomis, I think, and two or three others whose names I cannot recall. All who came to us before the year 1886 must be met at depots seven or eight miles distant on Saturday and returned on Monday and entertained in our homes. That part fell largely to us (Mr. and Mrs. William M. Frazier) and I remember it as being pleasantest of all, the getting acquainted with these friends and the inspiration received from their presence.

Again, in 1889, we decided to try to have preaching all of the time and made arrangements with Carrie A. Rice who was a recent graduate of Lombard Divinity School to come and live with us. She was ordained January 9, 1890.

She stayed with us several months and did some good work, one item of which was the organizing and establishing of our Sunday School. We had thought that we could not have a Sunday School, that the place was too small for two, and the Congregationalists had always maintained one, but our pastor insisted it was her duty, and our duty, to make the effort, and all were delightfully surprised at the result. We were, and are still proud of our Sunday School which has remained with us as a permanent institution, although the pastor's health soon failed and we were again obliged to resort to supplies for the pulpit.

In 1892 and 1893, Dr. Cantwell of Chicago supplied the pulpit regularly once in two weeks and his presence was appreciated as being a strong right hand.

In 1893, 1894 and 1895, Rev. Olympia Brown Willis of Racine supplied the pulpit one half of the time. When she could not be present herself, she sent someone else. Several times,

the delightful Dr. Effinger from Chicago (Unitarian) and once Rev. Mrs. Perkins from Ohio. Quite often she sent us a student, Mrs. Nellie Mann Opdale. The longer our people listened to Mrs. Brown the better she was appreciated as she is brilliant, broadminded and true.

In 1896, Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Opdale were to come alternately one half of the time and during the year Mrs. Opdale was ordained, an account of which will undoubtedly be given from the parish where it occurred. In 1897, we were made happy by being able to have Rev. Mrs. Opdale as resident pastor. She is with us still and under her guiding care, a vigorous young people's society has grown up. I will not say too much of her for fear some of you may be envious and try to get her away from us.

We have made it a point never to have what we could not pay for, consequently, no debts accrue. We mostly raise money by subscription; sometimes when uncertain how many Sundays, the sum would be so much for each preaching Sunday. Our hall rent and collections bring us about one hundred dollars per year. The Sunday School is provided for separately. Our ladies society has for two years subscribed \$100 per year for preaching, besides providing for numerous expenses.

One word in regard to the union of two churches. I do not believe any church would be as well pleased with such an organization as with a single church of their own kind. We are not ready enough to lay aside non-essentials and personal preferences; we all dearly love to have our own way. But we are doing well; we would wish to know if any who are situated in the same way are doing better. It was thought that the Unitarians furnished about one-third of the finances and surely some of our best workers.

One other point ought to be spoken of. There seems to be among us no contention as to whether our preacher shall be a woman or a man. My own impression is that a woman can do better parish work than a man, but wisdom and consecration are necessary for success be the preacher who they may.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs. M. M. Frazier. 1898.